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U.S. House approves Sand Creek measure

By JOE HANEL

CHIEFTAIN WASHINGTON BUREAU

WASHINGTON — A national monument to Indians slaughtered on Colorado's Eastern Plains on Monday got a step closer to opening when the House of Representatives approved legislation to acquire land for the memorial.

The Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site will commemorate one of the darkest days in the state's history. On Nov. 29, 1864, an estimated 700 volunteer soldiers attacked an Indian village and killed more than 150 people, mostly women, children and the elderly.

The Indians — members of the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes — believed they were camped under the protection of the government.

"To some looking at the land today it might not seem like much on the surface, however, this massacre is seared into the history of the American frontier," said U.S. Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, R-Colo., who sponsored the bill.

"It also serves as a poignant point in our government's relationship with the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes. I am encouraged with today's vote because the tribes are much closer to preserving this solemn place,"

Musgrave said.

Col. John Chivington led the federal troops in the massacre. Last year, the Longmont City Council renamed a street that bore his name.

Congress established the historic site in 2000, but it has remained closed and undeveloped until more land could be brought into the park's boundaries.

Musgrave's bill incorporates the 1,465-acre Dawson Ranch into the monument — sufficient land to allow the National Parks Service and Indian tribes to proceed with developing the monument.

Currently, the monument has

920 acres, even though Congress authorized a 12,500-acre monument.

Former Sen. Ben Campbell had pushed similar legislation last year, but Congress adjourned before it got around to voting on the bill.

The House passed the bill on a voice vote. Voice votes are used to pass noncontroversial bills without asking for a roll call vote of all 435 members.

The Senate now must still pass the bill. Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., is sponsoring the Senate version, with Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., as the co-sponsor.